

Looking and Feeling Sun-sational



Spring is just around the corner and once again, we're feeling the sun's warm rays. What a glorious feeling after those record breaking cold days in February!

Whether you are enjoying outdoor life in your backyard or vacationing in the sunny south, protecting yourself from ultraviolet (UV) radiation is strongly recommended.

Are you wondering if you should really pay attention to UV rays? Absolutely. UV rays are the main risk factor for skin cancer (Cancer Care Ontario, 2005). Skin cancer is on the rise in Canada and all over the world (World Health Organization, 2002). Repeated sunburns and chronic over-exposure to UV radiation (natural or artificial), thinning of the ozone layer, and a 'not so sun' safe lifestyle put Canadians at high risk of skin cancer (Cancer Care Ontario, 2003).

Types of Skin Cancer

There are three types of skin cancer. The first two types are squamous cell carcinoma and basal cell carcinoma. Both types can lead to disfigurement. Sadly, in a 2005 media release, the Canadian Dermatology Association (CDA) reported that young people are now being diagnosed with basal cell carcinoma, which in the past typically affected people over 50 years of age.

The prevalence of melanoma, the third type of skin cancer, has dramatically increased since the 1970's. Melanoma is a deadly form of skin cancer and is expected to cause approximately 17 deaths per week in Canada (Canadian Cancer Society, 2006). Nearly one-third of melanoma cancers occur in 20 to 44 year olds. The good news about melanoma is that, if caught early, it has a cure rate of about 90%.

Know Your Skin

It is natural for older adults to talk to their doctor about spots or moles on their skin because skin cancer is expected in that age group. However, when it comes to finding skin cancer early, Canadians of all ages need to check their skin. The CDA recommends checking our skin and looking for changes every month. Download a "How To" brochure at http://www.dermatology.ca/english/newsite/graphics_en/selfexam_eng.pdf.

The ABC's of Moles

When checking your skin, look for new spots or the following changes to existing moles:



Asymmetry

Change in shape: one half is different than the other half.



Border Irregularity

Change from smooth to irregular edges.



Colour variation

Change in colour.



Diameter

Change in size.

The Canadian Cancer Society (CCS) has a great free bookmark that provides colour photos of what to look for when checking moles. This bookmark is available from your local CCS or from your local public health unit.

MOLES

More on Moles

Moles – The total number of moles on your skin increases with over-exposure to the sun, especially with sunburns before the age of 12 years. A mole is a common, non-cancerous group of coloured skin cells. However, the more moles you have, the more at risk you are for developing melanoma.

On average, each person has 25 moles. Moles usually appear by one year of age. The number of moles peak during your adolescence and young adulthood.

Learn the new way of thinking about the healthy skin alphabet. Do you know the ABC'S of moles?

Educate yourself about how to reduce your risk for skin cancer.

Seek medical attention if you notice any changes.

Learn about moles and melanoma at the CDA's website at http://www.dermatology.ca/patients_public/info_patients/skin_cancer/malignant_melanoma.html.

Tanning to Look Healthier: an Urban Legend?

In 1923 when Coco Chanel, a famous Parisian fashion designer, returned from a French Riviera holiday with a tan, she sparked a new fashion trend. By the 1960's, tanned skin was in! Having a tan meant you had time and money to leisurely hang out in the sun and transform into a bronzed beauty. Even in 2007, a lot of people still believe they look healthier if their skin is tanned.

Today, we know more about UV radiation and tanning. We know that tanned skin is damaged skin. Once we over-expose our skin to UV radiation, either from the sun or tanning beds, we damage our skin cells. Some cells will repair themselves but others will not. UV radiation damage is cumulative. In other words, every time we over-expose our skin to UV radiation and get a tan, new healthy skin cells are damaged. This type of skin damage cannot be reversed and can lead to freckles, brown spots, accelerated aging and loss of elasticity which results in dry and coarse skin and wrinkles.



Is it Possible to Get a Safe Tan?

The only way to get a safe tan is by using a self-tanner. Self-tanners are a cream or lotion that contains a colourless sugar called "dihydroxyacetone (DHA)". It tints the colour of dead skin cells. In a few days, you will shed the dead skin cells and lose your tan. This product is considered very safe by the CDA, but as with any product, you do need to be aware of the rare possibility of irritation or an allergic reaction. Self-tanners provide very little sun protection so you should still apply sunscreen as you normally would before exposure to the sun. Avoid other products such as "tanning accelerators" or "tanning pills" that may contain tyrosine and canthaxanthin as these products have not been proven to be effective and can even be harmful. Ensure the ingredient in the self-tanner is indeed DHA. Always read directions carefully to avoid streaking and dark areas around ankles, knees, elbows, and hands.



Arbour Week

Celebrate Arbour week, April 27th to May 6th, 2007 by planting a tree. Trees provide shade from UV rays, remove carbon dioxide from the air, provide shelter for birds and animals, reduce demand for fossil energy, and lift our spirits. For more information, visit the Tree Canada Foundation at www.treecanada.ca.

Where's the Shade?

Seeking shade when the sun is most intense, between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., is one way to protect your skin. Shade comes in many shapes and sizes. It can range from a personal or golf umbrella, trees, awnings or permanent roof structure. However, it is important to note that when in the shade, UV rays *may* damage skin because they can reflect back onto your skin. For example, snow reflects up to 80% of UV rays because it is bright white and dry sand reflects up to 25% of UV rays. In fact, any surface that could potentially reflect light could reflect UV radiation. As a result, the best way to protect yourself from over-exposure to the sun is to combine shade with sun- protective clothing, a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses, and broad spectrum sunscreen that contains a Sun Protective Factor(SPF) of 15 or higher. Sun-protective clothing consists of fabrics that are tightly woven, dark, and loose fitting.

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